

Advicenow guides: helping advisers and advice service users

An evaluation of Advicenow's internet-based information guides

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About Advicenow

Advicenow.org.uk is an independent, not-for-profit website providing accurate, up-to-date information on rights and legal issues in England and Wales.

www.advicenow.org.uk

Advicenow is a project of Advice Services Alliance, the coordinating body for independent advice services in the UK. ASA members AdviceUK; Citizens Advice; Age Concern England; DIAL UK; Law Centres; Shelter and Youth Access are our main partners along with other leading advice and information providers.

Our internet search engine brings together all the best information on the law and rights from over 200 UK websites. Every link has been hand picked, checked for quality and summarised by our experienced team. The Advicenow website also has a range of articles, features and downloadable guides providing a lively and readable introduction to rights and the law.

Since 2003 Advicenow has been funded by the Legal Services Commission to develop 'How to' information for the public on a range of legal topics identified by Advicenow and agreed with LSC. To date we have produced 12 guides on topics such as divorce, young workers, bailiffs, discrimination, and homelessness. 11 of these are available as free downloads at:

<http://www.advicenow.org.uk/go/feature/index.html>

The aim of the 'How to' guides has been both to fill gaps in the provision of information to the public and to extend and develop the range and types of information available. We are particularly keen to produce attractive information that reaches out to its audiences by using varied and interesting presentation techniques that can grab the reader's attention – such as case studies, cartoon illustrations, 'top tips', and myths and misconceptions – all alongside more solid content.

Guides are produced in collaboration with the advice networks, advice agencies, Law Centres, and others. Advicenow commissions information writers and front-line agencies who draft the text, check it for accuracy, edit and so on. Agencies may also provide source materials for case studies.

For more information about our guides, contact Theresa Harris
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About this evaluation

This evaluation is one of a series planned by Advicenow as part of our development of an enhanced role for internet and paper information in enabling the public to deal effectively with day to day problems. Advicenow information has the additional explicit aim of improving the effectiveness of the services provided by advice agencies, by giving service users more and better resources through which they can acquire independent knowledge, skills and confidence. Confident and knowledgeable users will make much more appropriate use of advice services, and will be better equipped to work with advisers to solve problems.

For further information about this evaluation, or about our wider developments of 'How to' guides and toolkits, please contact Martin Jones, Project Director, on Martin.Jones@advicenow.org.uk tel +44 (0)20 7939 0890

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Pilots and other evaluation

In the summer and autumn of 2005 Advicenow set up three evaluation pilot projects to test the effectiveness of its downloadable internet guides. Two of these pilots were based on a partnership between Law Centres, Connexions advisers and youth workers, and a third was operated by a number of regional mediation networks.

The two Law Centres in the pilots had been involved in developing Advicenow's guide to homelessness for young people (*Homeless? - Get your foot in the door*), and both were keen to assess how well it was working. The regional mediation networks piloted the Advicenow guide to divorce - *Divorce – a Survival Toolkit*. Two other Advicenow guides - *Bailiffs & debt collection* and *Young Workers* – although not included in pilots, were evaluated through general discussions with advisers and users.

The three pilots involved use of the guides for a period of around eight weeks with service users, in the main by informal advisers¹, supported by advice workers.

The evaluation sought to address a broad spectrum of issues about the usefulness of the guides for all of the different users - advice workers, informal advisers, and advice service clients².

Over a period of two months individual qualitative interviews and topic-guided group discussions took place with all three groups in the pilots. Evaluation of the other two guides sought to glean impressions of the value of the guides through topic-guided discussions.

1.2 Findings

The general findings were very positive. The evaluation showed that the success of the guides depended on a combination of three elements: the high quality well-focused content; the range of information techniques used, and the range of design techniques used.

Guides worked best when they provided an overview of a specific user 'situation'. The most successful guides offered a clear focus on an identified 'life situation' of relevance to a clearly specified user. A successful overview consisted of information

¹Informal advisers are professionals who are providing a service to the public, but who are not trained advice workers. In this report this includes Connexions advisers, youth workers, and family mediators, but it could well include many other types of professional, including, for example health workers and housing agency staff. Informal advisers often share the same service users with advice agencies, and have links with those agencies. Informal advisers are also described as 'intermediaries' and sometimes as 'problem noticers' in other contexts. In this report the term 'informal advisers' has been chosen because it best conveys the relatively limited but very valuable advice role they have with their service users.

² In the evaluation there were three kinds of users of the guides, and to make it clear which is under discussion, where necessary the report describes the type of user more carefully. The rather awkward term 'end user' has been chosen to show when the user is what might be called the 'client' of a 'service', or 'the public', in other contexts.

that combined legal rights and guidance, personal issues and guidance, decision-making and steps to take across a range of aspects of the situation, and mythologies to be debunked. *Divorce - a survival toolkit* was described as the best exemplar of this overall approach. *Young Workers* was seen as at least in part as structured around the law and rights, and so less clear both as to audience and purpose.

The use of a very wide range of presentation techniques was a further key to success - grabbing and keeping the reader's attention was shown to be a key requirement of an effective guide. Such techniques included the use of illustrative and realistic case studies, question and answer explorations of issues, checklists and prompts about key factors and key decisions, quotes from real-life experiences, glossaries and other explanations of jargon, board-game style presentations of the sequence of events and presentation of the decisions that needed to be made. Presenting information in such a variety of ways also accommodated the different learning styles of different users.

The range of design techniques also contributed to the success of the guides. By leading with images of people, and illustrating points with cartoons, diagrams, varied uses of colour etc., the reader's attention could be held with greater certainty, opening up the text and making the guide much more interesting.³ Some end-users wanted the design of guides to fit better with the expectations of their age group, and the report takes this point on when it suggests relating design more closely to target group from the outset.

The guides were especially helpful for the informal advisers in the pilots in helping them to understand problems. For the end-users, guides achieved their maximum impact when used in the interactions between informal advisers and end-users, and the report concludes that informal advisers have a key role to play as an important channel for the dissemination of rights and legal information, notably enabling early intervention.

Perhaps unsurprisingly Law Centre workers did not see the guides as of direct help in their own work with clients, but for Law Centre clients there was a desire to have information of the type provided in the guides to take away from an interview. The report concludes that guidance for advisers and informal advisers on how to use the information with users would help to improve its impact.

Some advisers took the view that some problems or issues, such as homelessness or divorce, were too complex to be addressed by end-users without professional support. However, the evaluation did not succeed in testing whether the end-users agreed with this. Whilst it is clear that where users had met advisers the interpretative role of the adviser had been of value, this did not necessarily indicate that the users could access information unaided.

Most respondents thought that access to information was a key difficulty. Some respondents saw use of the internet as more routine for some groups than others, and described the value of a printed guide as limited by the chances of a user picking the right one up at the right time for them. Whilst these thoughts were in the main

³ A set of 'quality standards' are proposed in the Conclusions that describe these components of quality in more detail.

speculative, there was a clear sense from respondents that better, more obvious links between the www.advicenow.org.uk internet guides and the paper copies used in the pilots was desirable.

The evaluation pilots enabled some of the professionals involved to gain insight both into the role of the guides for their own services, and the value of the guides to their clients. These gains in understanding have helped to motivate advisers to stay involved in the future development and evaluation of guides aimed at their service users.

The different types of advisers involved in the pilots were helped in the pilots and in the evaluation to develop new understandings of how their various services were benefiting their users, encouraging their sense of the value of a partnership approach both to services and to information development.

1.3 Recommendations

Advicenow's guides would be improved by the further development and use of a set of quality standards that are closely linked to careful identification of target users and their life situations by engaging with advisers and with end-users as intensively as is possible.

Advicenow's successful use of design, information presentation techniques and high quality information content should be sharpened up to ensure first, that these techniques do not become too complicated, and second, that design is related more carefully to specific audiences. The report suggests that Advicenow unify its partnership approach to guide development with pre-planned pilot evaluations.

To make the best use of the guides, Advicenow should develop support materials for the guides that address explicitly the ways in which both advisers and informal advisers can use the guides in their own practices with their own users.

To consolidate the quality of guide development, the report also recommends that Advicenow consider an induction process for its writers in order to pass on lessons learned, and to improve access to its website through an approach to Google, as part of its ongoing marketing efforts.

2. The evaluation

2.1 Background

Advice Services Alliance (ASA) is the umbrella organisation and coordinating body for independent advice services in the UK. In 2001 ASA established a project – Advicenow - to develop internet information resources for the public. The Advicenow website was launched in June 2003, and can be viewed at www.advicenow.org.uk.

The aim of the Advicenow website is to deliver a high quality, integrated legal information service to the public through the internet. To achieve this aim, Advicenow brings together links to the most useful legal information material on the internet, within a newly-developed system that stores this information effectively and delivers it online.

Advicenow also researches the need for different types of legal information on the internet. For the past two years, working in collaboration with ASA's members and with specific advice agencies, Advicenow has commissioned the writing of new legal information to meet the need both for new content and for new approaches to information provision.

This newly produced Advicenow information has emphasised style and quality, using a rich mix of types of information - including case studies, diagrams, "Question & Answer", "Jargon busters" and so on - techniques that are commonplace in commercial popular publishing, but seldom found in rights information.

Work on the new guides began in 2004, and the first batch was incorporated into the website in 2005 by the addition of a "Features" section containing the guides – www.advicenow.org.uk/features.

In July 2005 Advicenow began a further phase of collaboration with ASA members and advice agencies to develop a second set of internet guides, with the eventual aim of providing a total of 16 new guides for the Features section by mid 2006. Of the eleven new guides currently on the Advicenow website, nine are in downloadable PDF format.

During the same period Advicenow also developed a 'Self Help' information section on its website, and in 2004 undertook a qualitative evaluation of the usefulness of this section⁴. The evaluation of the internet guides took as its starting point the findings from this first evaluation.

2.2 The 'Self-help' evaluation

⁴ ISB Self-Help project: Final Report, March 2005, Advicenow. Note that the Self-Help section has been renamed the 'How to' section on the website, so that both the guides and the self-help information can become part of a 'How to' approach to information on the site. (http://www.advicenow.org.uk/go/about/au_static_73.html)

In 2004 the 'How to' section of the Advicenow website was evaluated through direct observation of use of the information, and interviews and group discussions with both advice workers and users, producing three main findings:

- that good presentation techniques were essential for the effective use of information - the more 'active' formats such as checklists and discussion sheets were more likely to be used than simple text, and were also assessed more favourably, both by advice workers and others;
- that whilst self help can be useful for some users in resolving legal problems, there is a concomitant real need to develop problem-solving skills among the public, to make best use of self help materials;
- that "assisted self help" - a model in which the users enjoy the support of a more skilled individual both for using the site and in acquiring skills - was especially powerful.

2.3 Aims

The general aim of the evaluation was to assess the value of the guides in helping advisers, informal advisers see above and end-users to deal effectively with legal problems.

The target users of the information in these pilots included the users seeking help with their problems, their advisers, and informal advisers who were working in pilot partnerships (see below) with advisers to provide a service to these users.

It was expected that both advisers and informal advisers would find a place for the guides in their own practice, as well as in their interactions, or relationships, with their users. Assessing whether the 'professionals' might find the guides useful *for themselves* was therefore an important aim of the evaluation.

2.4 Piloting the guides

Although the guides were aimed at the general public, Advicenow did not have the resources to evaluate casual uses of the guides - for example, at home, in libraries, or in internet cafes. Evaluation of such 'unstructured' uses of the guides would have required resources well beyond those available to Advicenow for this evaluation.

Advicenow sought therefore to provide frameworks for evaluation by setting up a number of small pilots of use of the guides, in two cases through partnerships between advice agencies and other types of adviser. These partnerships provided accessible and defined contexts for use of the guides that offered an opportunity for evaluation. In all three pilot projects were set up involving two different guides, in August and September 2005.

2.4.1 Law Centre partnerships: the homelessness guides

Two specialist Law Centres – Streetlegal in North London and Streetwise in South London - agreed to work with local partners in evaluating Advicenow's two young people's homelessness guides: "*Homeless - Get your Foot in the Door...*" and "*Homeless - Get your Foot in the Door – Advice for Advisers*" (www.advicenow.org.uk/younghomeless) – both written in association with Streetlegal. Local partners for these two pilots were young people's personal advisers in the local Connexions agencies and youth workers in the Youth Service, as well as staff in voluntary sector sheltered accommodation. These partner advisers

are described in the evaluation as 'informal advisers', distinguishing them from the advisers in the Law Centres.

Both projects were provided with high quality colour copies of the two guides for use by the informal advisers and their clients, and a data sheet on which to record the uses made of the guides. The focus for this evaluation was on feedback from the solicitors at the Law Centres, the informal advisers who used the guides, and the guide end-users (in this case young homeless people) themselves.

2.4.2 Family mediation networks – the divorce guide

A third agreement - on use of Advicenow's *Divorce - a survival toolkit* – (www.advicenow.org.uk/divorce) was made with six regional mediation organisations through National Family Mediation. As with *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door*, mediation organisations were provided with high quality printed copies of the guide to give to users. A printed questionnaire about the guide was given to each mediator, with the option to give a copy to their clients if relevant.

The focus for this evaluation was on the views primarily of the mediators, with the additional possibility that some clients would either respond by completing the questionnaire, or agree to take part in a discussion. Finally, a short questionnaire about *Divorce - a survival toolkit* was added to the relevant page on the Advicenow website to enable feedback from direct internet use of the guide.

2.4.3 Other evaluation

Efforts were also made to create some form of pilot project for *Bailiffs & debt collection*, (www.advicenow.org.uk/bailiffs) but this was not secured within the timeframe. As a result, a single discussion about this guide, with the Money Advice Team Leader who had worked with Advicenow in producing the guide, allowed Advicenow to test some of the ideas emerging from the other evaluations – to see if issues emerging there had any resonance with uses of *Bailiffs & debt collection*.

Finally, *Young Workers* (www.advicenow.org.uk/youngworkers) was evaluated through a group interview with users, informal advisers and an advice worker at a migrant workers community centre. This centre had cooperated in the earlier 'How to' evaluation, and the advisers and users were happy to undertake a similar task for this evaluation.

2.5 Methods

The evaluation sought initially to use three methods:

- Collection of feedback data from agencies on their uses of the guide and user reactions to the guides in the course of those uses
- In-depth interviews with individual users and informal advisers
- Discussions with user and informal adviser groups

There were six research questions:

1. What is the nature of the contexts in which the guides were used?
2. How are guides used in each context?
3. Do the guides help the users in any ways, and if yes, how?
4. Are the guides used in other ways by advisers and informal advisers?

5. How might the information be improved ?
6. What can be learned from this particular evaluation, about how advisers can evaluate these types of information themselves?

A key goal for Advicenow in the development of information is to contribute to the creation of an information evaluation model useable by the independent advice sector. The possibility that elements of this evaluation could contribute to such a model was reviewed throughout the process, and is commented on in the later sections of this report.

Issues explored in answering the six questions were:

- Ease of use and the influences on this, both within the guides and in how they are used
- The value of different contexts for using the guides
- The value of different types of content
- The value of different types of techniques of presentation and of information flow and sequence
- The value of links to other resources potentially of help to users

2.6 The conduct of the evaluation

For *Divorce - a survival toolkit* there were individual and group telephone interviews, providing a variety of interactions, and also allowing some reporting on how the professionals interacted with their clients in using this guide. For *Homeless?*, group discussions took place both face-to-face and by telephone. There was a single interview with one respondent about *Bailiffs & debt collection* and a group interview with five respondents for *Young Workers*. This group comprised an advice worker, two informal advisers, and two users, all of whom were familiar with one another and were accustomed to discussion amongst themselves.

Data sheets provided to advisers and informal advisers were not completed by adviser or by informal advisers, and no data was collected using this method. Two mediation clients returned completed questionnaires about *Divorce - a survival toolkit*; no responses were received to the *Divorce* questionnaire on the website within the evaluation period. Because of the low rates of response, no data from the returned questionnaires was used in the evaluation.

Table 1: Types of participants in the evaluation of each guide

| Guide Discussed | Participant Type | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | User | Informal adviser | Advice Provider |
| Homeless? – Get your foot in the door | 7 | 8 | 3 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Divorce – a survival toolkit | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Bailiffs and debt | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Young Workers | 2 | 2 | 1 |

Table 1 shows that a total of 30 respondents were involved in the interviews and group discussions. Interviews with groups were both face-to-face and by telephone. There was a good mix of respondents for both *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* and *Young Workers*, providing reasonable feedback.

The numbers of respondents, broken down by evaluation method and guide discussed, are given next.

Table 2. Evaluation methods and respondents by guide

| Guide Discussed | Evaluation Method Used | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| | Individual Telephone Interview | Group Interview | Group Telephone Interview |
| Homeless? – Get your foot in the door | 0 | 16 | 2 |
| Divorce - a survival toolkit | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Bailiffs & debt collection | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Young Workers | 0 | 5 | 0 |

2.7 Evaluation issues

2.7.1 The value of qualitative methods

Since this was a qualitative evaluation with a relatively small number of respondents, it is important to understand the findings as exploratory rather than as a definitive statement of the attitudes found amongst adviser, informal adviser or user populations. Qualitative methods can reveal issues that might be overlooked in research based on structured interviews and surveys with strongly pre-defined lines of inquiry..

2.7.2 The value of real life testing

The evaluation of two of the guides drew on contemporary experiences of uses of the guide in the normal working contexts of advisers and others. These contexts - for the evaluation of *Homeless? – Get your foot in the door* and of *Divorce – a survival toolkit* – provided the best possible vehicle for exploring the views of participants who were likely to have used the guide recently to deal with problems. As a result, responses on these two guides are more detailed and varied than on the other two

guides evaluated. Given the lack of a practical pilot for *Young Workers* and *Bailiffs and debt collection*, these findings draw more heavily on opinion and general assessment, than is the case for the other two guides evaluated.

2.7.2 The role of quantitative evaluation

There was a very limited response to attempts to collect quantitative data. Because advisers are required by their employers to record a good deal of data on the problems they deal with and on their clients, it is difficult to secure their cooperation in additional data recording. Without a long period of preparation and involvement, this was never likely to be successful, although an attempt was made simply because there was a possibility that records might be kept.

Similarly, questionnaires were sent to mediators and were available on the website with only very limited expectations of returns. In the case of the website it was simply not known what response, if any there would be.

Although little quantitative data was obtained in this evaluation, this should not be seen as ruling out the use of self-completion methods, or structured interviews for the future. The need for a longer period of planning, and for the greater involvement of advisers and others in both the benefits of the guides and the evaluation process is evident, and future evaluations will need to tackle the issue of quantitative data collection earlier and more thoroughly.

Where areas of controversy, lack of clarity, or lack of relevant baseline data emerge, quantitative methods can be very useful to give a more certain grasp of the issues that have been uncovered by the qualitative methods. This has not been possible for this evaluation, but the results of this evaluation are capable of informing quantitative data collection at a later stage if this can be funded.

When further evaluations are carried out, qualitative findings can be tested by building up the numbers that are interviewed, and by following up and cross-checking the issues that emerge

2.7.4 Involving end-users

A particular issue for this evaluation was that it is very hard to access end-users. There was some success in reaching this group, but it would have been better to have reached more of them. Because respondents from among users were in single figures only, the evaluation was unable to reach conclusions about the value of the guides in helping users to resolve their legal issues.

2.7.5 Assessment of problem-solving

Whilst there were many opinions expressed that the guides would or should prove to be of value, it was not possible to track their use through to whatever role they may have played in problem-solving. With more time and resources the evaluation would have included extended case studies that could permit follow-up on users after contact with the guides, to explore what role the information might have played in helping resolve their problems.

3. Findings

3.1 The components of quality

3.1.1 Content and presentation

Generally, respondents were very positive about the guides. There was a sense, notably from the informal advisers, that information of this quality and scope was unusual in their fields. *Divorce - a survival toolkit* was particularly praised for the usefulness of both the flow and sequence of the information, and also the variety of presentation techniques used.

The one thing that particularly struck me from this particular guide, was that I was very, very impressed with the quality of the guide and the content. It's very, very clear, and very concise, it covers a variety of topics, and I think it is very self-explanatory, it is very easy to understand, it's in small bites of information. I think it is a very, very good guide, I don't see anything on there that needed to be improved, there's lots of phone numbers, lots of addresses, the clarity its very clear on de-mystifying the process, its very good.
(Telephone interview with Mediator, describing the *Divorce toolkit*)

Both the *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* and *Bailiffs & debt collection* guides were praised for the clarity and relevance of their content. The content of *Young Workers* was also seen as being of high quality in some aspects, but there were some reservations about its structure and approach (see below).

There were a number of techniques of presentation of information that were identified as making a key contribution to quality: jargon busters that clarified legal terms; information that offered practical steps, such as clear referral processes, telephone numbers, and details of contacts or venues - all of these helped users to understand what they needed to do to sort things out. The two *Homeless?* guides were especially praised by informal advisers for these qualities.

Other techniques used in the guides and identified as valuable ways of making the content clearer and more accessible were: bullet lists and other forms of checklist; question and answer formats; flow charts; and visually-presented overviews of processes such as the “clued up”⁵ presentation in *Divorce - a survival toolkit*. (‘Clued up’ which is on page 7 of the guide, is presented as a board game with moves and a sequence of actions and decisions).

Some of these had the additional benefit of supporting or facilitating active engagement with the guide by users, because they required the user to follow a process and work things out.

Some respondents went on to suggest the use of other techniques already popular in large circulation magazines – such as personality quizzes. Finally, the possibility of using some of these sections of a guide as a basis for training was seen as an additional benefit.

⁵ The clued up section of the Divorce guide is on page sets out a process and actions the two individuals need to go through, – all done as a sort of board game.

There were also mixed views on some of the presentation techniques. For example, the 'clued up' section of *Divorce - a survival toolkit*, although praised in general, was also criticised as too cluttered and so somewhat confusing. In general it was thought quite difficult to design active formats that users can engage with when they are dealing with difficult problems and therefore quite possibly distressed. For the future, respondents thought that such techniques would need to be used with great attention to detail and complexity.

3.1.2 Giving an overview

One of the most main features identified by respondents as a key to a successful guide was coverage of many aspects of a situation - described as an 'overview'. For example, in *Divorce - a survival toolkit*, many respondents considered that a key strength was including information on all of the different elements of divorce, rather than concentrating solely on 'rights'. This 'overview' really did help users to find their way through the difficulties of divorce. Respondents also described this as 'a well-rounded approach' to the issues. The same respondents saw the 'completeness' of both *Divorce* and *Bailiffs & debt collection* as a further key strength. By following the process from beginning to end, these guides led the user to the necessary end-points.

The guides offering an overview also approached the issues they addressed from a variety of angles. For instance, respondents praised *Divorce - a survival toolkit* for including information about the emotional process, the practical issues, information about mediation and alternative conflict resolution, as well as an overview of the legal process of divorce.

3.1.3 Clearly modelled 'situations'

Respondents felt in general that the focus and organising principle of the guides needed to be a clear notion of a 'situation' in which a user would need advice and guidance, and support in making a series of decisions. The overview described above therefore needs to be created around a defined 'situation'.

Respondents also saw the need to specify such a situation very carefully, by exploring fully and modelling the potential contexts in which the guides would be used. Such 'models' should include not only the information and decision aspects of the situation, but also accounts of the types of interactions - with professionals, with advice agencies, with for example government and local government - that might occur for the user within each 'situation'.

This is not to say that respondents thought that all guides must address some *broad* notion of a 'situation'. It might be, say, in the case of divorce and separation, that a distinct guide would be the best way to service the needs of separated people, or in the case of homelessness, of younger and older homeless people.

Respondents saw the narrow focus of *Homeless – get your foot in the door* as successful – a clearly identified situation was addressed only through brief introductory explanations followed by actions points. Respondents praised both *Homeless* guides for the clarity with which they provided the *introduction* to this situation and for being concise in doing it.

There were difficulties with *Young Workers* that respondents attributed in part to the inadequacy of a focus on situation – respondents wondered if it had been well-enough specified at the start of the process of producing it. This produced two difficulties. First, the information content applied to a much wider range of workers than the name suggested, and this was confusing. Second, this guide was difficult to use because of its structure – which was mostly determined by aspects of legal rights, rather than by the situations or contexts in which the target users might find themselves.

Can I make a comment on the guide in general. It's a little bit of a hodgepodge I think, because it talks about young workers. But in fact it talks in general about what your rights are, what the minimum wage is, how you get dismissed, how you end your job and all the rest of it.
(Informal adviser, on *Young Workers*)

Whilst *Young Workers* had content applicable to a wider range of users than suggested by the title, by way of contrast, *Homeless? Get your foot in the door*, despite the relevance of its information for the target group of 16-17 year olds, was criticised by respondents for not dealing with people either side of this age range - 18 or over, or younger than 16. However, given that there are specific entitlements and rules applying to this age group, this was not resolved with alternative suggestions.

Respondents wondered whether *Young Workers* might well be most accessible to people who already knew something about employment law and rights, as it did offer a useful summary that could be dipped into as a reminder by readers familiar with the broad spectrum of those rights, in contrast to the likelihood that a user who did not have an understanding of employment law would not be able to access the guide so easily. The general view of respondents in this group discussion was that, overall, *Young Workers* was guided too much by an advice worker approach, rather than by a clear model of a user situation.

There was therefore a fairly clear view that the title of a guide needs to accurately reflect and describe the situation it seeks to deal with, and that the content and title should be aligned. It was also seen as helpful if titles corresponded with the ways in which the majority of intended users search for information - to promote access and to satisfy expectations when searching for information.

Respondents in the mediation networks saw *Divorce - a survival toolkit* as self-evidently drafted with the user's context in mind, including a sense of the types of professionals they would be likely to encounter, and the knowledge they might need in order to support those encounters.

Both *Divorce* and *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* are 'about' easily identifiable situations, and respondents felt that within these broad situations it should be possible to discover whether, for example, younger and older homeless people, or people undergoing separation, would be likely to expect guides to address their own 'situations' more specifically. If they do have such expectations, respondents saw this as the principle that should guide the decisions about which guides to produce and for which specific situations, or combinations of situations.

Respondents described a model of guide development that produced a series of related products. By taking more care in deciding on the most appropriate situations and the users who need information the most, guides could be conceived and drafted in relation to one another, each addressing a specified context and user or users. With cross-referencing and linking between guides, users would be less likely to miss the right one for them.

3.1.4 Information that crosses professional boundaries

Mediator respondents were especially pleased that *Divorce* stretched across professional boundaries. Mediators wanted more information about how solicitors and mediators can work together, including how legal aid might support this.

There is at present little information available that spans professional boundaries in this way, and mediators praised *Divorce* for doing so. Mediators clearly experience a particular set of problems around working both with solicitors and with other advisers - for instance with Citizens Advice Bureau. Among these advisers, mediators detected an unsatisfactorily low level of awareness of the role of mediation.

Mediators wanted more information in the guide about mediation in divorce, and were concerned that the guide could be read as portraying mediation as a second best option to legal proceedings, and as something only used in amicable divorces and separations.

The observations show the potential value of consultation with the professionals involved in a user's 'situation' to ensure that a sense of the relations between professionals that a user will need to deal with is built in to guides, and that any gaps in information provision about these relationships are filled.

3.2 Uses of the guides

3.2.1 An active role in users' interviews with professionals

Some young people thought it unlikely that they would pick *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* up and read it spontaneously, and generally thought it more likely that they would read and use the information in the guide if an informal adviser or advice worker took them through it.

Homeless? - Get your foot in the door was designed explicitly with such a usage in mind, with two editions of the guide – one for informal advisers and one for users. Advice workers and informal advisers did find that it supported their interactions with their users – a finding supported by the discussions of formats (above) and learning styles (below).

3.2.2 Independent sources of information

Some respondents also valued the guides as independent sources of information - filling a real gap in information provision that existed in part because of the politics of information provision about user problems. Both mediators and law centre solicitors interviewed saw some potential conflicts of interest in information provision to users in the course of dealing with problems. These conflicts could and did lead to unintentional bias, or even refusals to provide accurate neutral information to users.

A good illustration of this was provided by mediators who had little expectation that solicitors would actively propose mediation to their clients. In addition, solicitors' clients would often come to mediation with expectations about likely settlements that were unrealistic, based on misunderstanding the solicitor's advice.

Very often they walk straight into a solicitor's office, and because the solicitor's job is to give their client information, rightly so, they will often come here and say: 'My solicitor says I am entitled to 80% of all the assets'. What they mean is the solicitor says that's what they can aspire to - the reality is that you might get 60-40. Or 50-50. So they don't get advice from a solicitor, they get a best-case scenario.

(Mediator in telephone interview)

Similarly, Law Centre solicitors dealing with young homeless people often found that the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) - often the first point of contact for homeless young people - was reluctant to give out information that might lead to a young person obtaining housing from them, and thus costing them money. Young homeless respondents found a visit to the HPU frustrating and forbidding, with a sense of being fobbed off, and of staff being unhelpful or obstructive.

3.2.3 Guides as 'evidence' for client use

Young people, youth workers and law centre solicitors all found it difficult to get the local HPU to act on its legal obligations to provide housing. One informal adviser suggested sending a young person to the Homeless Persons' Unit with the homelessness guide in order to use it as proof, in writing, of their rights – this, it was suggested, would help their claim to be taken seriously. The Advice worker who discussed the debt and bailiffs guide suggested a similar usage of that guide. Bailiffs are not allowed to enter your property without your consent, and a user who had this in print would be able more easily to ensure that Bailiffs did actually observe this.

An example was also given of how the guide provided evidence for use by an informal adviser:

But it's good in terms of bouncing⁶. Initially when we were made aware that 16-17 year olds were counted as vulnerable because of their age, we would constantly go to the homeless unit and they would say 'No we can't help you you need to take them to social services'. That's when it would be useful to go with this and push it up against the glass.

(Youth worker in group discussion)

These examples illustrate how careful discussion of the potential contexts for usage of guides can uncover unexpected viable uses. This simple format of *Homeless – Get you foot in the door* - lends itself readily to establishing what someone's rights are.

⁶ 'Bouncing' in this context means refusing to deal with the person and sending them somewhere else, in cases where the HPU has a clear responsibility to accept a homelessness application

3.3 Issues for users

3.3.1 Matching design to audience

Some users commented on the need to use design that meshes with what is familiar to the target audience, and to their expectations. In the case of *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door*, 'attractiveness' was described through examples such as a rave party flyer, so that, as one young person put it, among a pile of boring pamphlets, this one would stand out.

I would change the colours, and I would do more bubble writing and graffiti writing, make it more teenage. Make it friendly so that teenagers are attracted to it but at the same time make sure it has all the important information that they need.

(Young person, in group telephone interview)

The issue of grabbing user's attention is crucial, if they are to have some chance of reading the guide. However, it may be that the amount of information (on narcotic usage and sexual health) that has taken such an approach over the past decade might not be such a startling innovation in relation to youth audiences.

This issue was also brought up about *Divorce - a survival toolkit*. The one male mediator who responded pointed out that the cover of the guide featured a picture of a man and a woman, with only the man's face visible. The case study on the front page used the woman's voice, and so the man was described from the woman's point of view. This might be good design/content from a woman's point of view, but the mediator described how it is common for men approaching divorce or mediation to feel victimised, and so from a male point of view, this was not an appropriate way of presenting things.

Young homeless people did recognise their own situation in the way *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* was presented. Some of the young people interviewed said that they would like to see the faces of the people in the photographs more, and would like the tone of the images and guide to be more positive and welcoming, suggesting the need for a fine balance between encouragement and realism in the presentation of the guides, as well as in their content.

3.3.2 The limits of user knowledge and understanding

Despite Advicenow's efforts to involve advice workers in drafting their guides, there was sometimes a mismatch between the content of the guides and the users. For instance, on the *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* guide, Community Legal Services (CLS) Direct is given as a point of contact. The young homeless people interviewed were unaware of what CLS Direct was, or what it could do for them. When CLS Direct had been explained to them, they then could not at all see that they might have a helpful relationship with a solicitor. They understood that solicitors were a source of legal information, and also thought it unlikely that they would be able to understand what was told to them by a solicitor.

Young homeless respondents also doubted that they would approach a solicitor alone, and would prefer the support of an informal adviser - such as their social worker - in order to be able to deal with such an encounter. There was concern that they would not be able to understand what was said to them, or what to do next.

Similar concerns were expressed in relation to the way a young person viewed the Homeless Person's Unit:

They don't do anything, they don't listen to you, because they think you are young, you don't know what you are talking about, they don't care, they don't pay any attention to you, that's what loads of people have said, you have to get there, and the person will just talk to you like you're stupid.
(Young person in individual interview)

The 'gap' in knowledge and understanding between some user groups and professionals was highlighted in this discussion when a Law Centre solicitor present explained what CLS Direct was and what it could do. Despite what seemed to be a very clear explanation, when asked what they thought was meant, the young people were unable to answer, hearing only 'a lot of legal jargon'.

3.3.3 Limited access to the internet

Respondents were concerned that internet based information will not reach some users. The young people, informal advisers and advice workers interviewed in relation to the *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door* guide all doubted that young people in general were likely to seek legal advice directly from the internet⁷. Whilst they used the internet sometimes, it was never for gathering this kind of information.

The informal advisers and advice worker interviewed in relation to Young Workers had not noticed the link to the Advicenow website on the front page of the guide. This is important, since users might also find this a problem, and this might be an obstacle to finding other information relevant to them.

3.3.4 Reading as a way to acquire information

The young people interviewed described themselves as unlikely to get this type of information by reading it. It appeared that they tended not to read very much at all, and when they did read, this would usually be related to their leisure activities.

In addition, one of the young people interviewed seemed close to being functionally illiterate, an issue also raised by the advice worker interviewed in relation to *Bailiffs & debt collection*, who had many illiterate clients. Not only can the internet not be considered a universal mode of delivery, but neither can print.

3.3.5 The importance of life skills

A distinction was drawn by advisers between the difficulties of individual user interaction with a guide, and the potential benefits of interactions facilitated by an adviser, or an informal adviser. In both these cases the informal advisers drew explicit parallels with training and with skills acquisition.

I have people now, they are forced to get bank accounts, to get their benefits, and they get a bank statement, and I ask them do you know what this means, and they haven't got a clue. Or a rent statement showing that they are in arrears, they don't understand it, they don't know what dr. and cr.(mean), a lot

⁷ But note that Advicenow's model of internet use has never assumed that the public in general would look to the internet for 'legal advice' as a first point of enquiry. Advicenow's development of 'campaigns' such as Living Together shows the direction of Advicenow's assessment of the best role for the internet as a popular tool for advice.

*of times people are scared to ask because they don't want to look stupid.
Even a housing benefit letter, they don't understand it.*
(Adviser in group discussion)

For example in the case of *Homeless? - Get your foot in the door*, many of the things that held people back in securing housing were not so much a lack of information, but a lack of skills:

*...things like life skills, getting settled, benefits, budgeting, education,
employment, or things as simple as being able to write a cheque.*
(Adviser in group discussion)

The development of 'capacities' was seen by adviser respondents as an essential step for members of the public in dealing with their own problems. The 'active' elements of the guides (see above) were thought by respondents to be one useful tool for acquiring the necessary skills.

I would feel a bit scared, then once I had spoken to them, if I still had a social worker, I would go and talk to my social worker, and I would get her to write, to come with me for a meeting and with whoever they had advised me to go to.

(Young person in group telephone interview)

Some issues, like homelessness and divorce, were seen by informal advisers and advisers as being too complex for end-users to handle on their own - they may require professional support partly due to 'life skill' issues like booking, attending and following up on a meeting, and partly due to fear of 'legal' issues. With situations like this it is especially important that materials are designed for usage in relation to both advice workers and informal advisers.

3.3.6 Learning Styles

Respondents' sense of the value of the range of presentation techniques extended to observations on the different 'learning styles' users can have. Some users might be more likely to take on board spoken advice, some written advice or information presented in a diagram. Also people are generally more likely to take on board information presented to them in relation to a variety of senses and media. The variety of presentation techniques helped to meet the variety of learning styles, making it more likely for any one user to be able to understand the issues involved:

Well yeah, I am sure you know about different learning styles, there are some people who haven't heard a word that a solicitor says, but they might get a guide of printed typed text, but a visual representation with a bit of talk usually means that people can fill all the gaps in their understanding...

(Mediator in telephone interview)

Presenting, for example, divorce issues, through spoken explanations alone is far less likely to mean something to a user than a presentation that brings together speech, images, text, diagrams, interaction and talk about emotions.

3.4 The value of guides to professionals

3.4.1 Advice workers and informal advisers

Both informal advisers and advice workers felt that the information in the guides was more useful to informal advisers than advice workers. Advice workers saw themselves as unlikely (especially in the case of solicitors) to use the guides as a primary source of information in their own practice since they considered their own expertise to be sufficient. It is of course possible that other advice workers, who are not as subject specialist, might do so.

By contrast the informal advisers who piloted *Divorce - a survival toolkit* were impressed by its usefulness to them as an overview for their clientele, as well as something they could refer to themselves when working with clients.

3.4.2 The value of 'guidance' sheets

Other supporting materials, such as accompanying sheets that outlined how the materials might be used for training, how they might be printed up and displayed, or how they might be used during an interview, would help advice workers and intermediaries to understand how they could best use the guides. This is particularly important since they are being delivered in a 'virtual' format, allowing new ways of using the materials which may well be unfamiliar to advice workers and intermediaries.

3.5 Access and distribution issues

3.5.1 Downloadable and printed guides

Respondents were concerned about the quality of guide print-outs from their office printers⁸. Some features of guides – especially the photos and the blocks of colour – did not come out well. As much of the not-for-profit advice sector has very basic IT set-ups, the ways in which good printed copies could be obtained was a clear issue identified.

Types of internet connection, and download times were also an issue for guide printing.

The advice worker who had been involved in writing *Bailiffs & debt collection* had no very strong idea of the possible ways in which it might be used. Produced as an internet PDF, it had not occurred to her that she could print it out and put it out in the waiting room for users to pick up.

What does this tell us? Producing advice-type information primarily for the internet is relatively new, and it might be useful to issue guidance for advice workers and informal advisers about the ways in which the guides could be 'delivered' to the intended user groups.

3.5.2 Internet searches for legal information

Most of the advice workers, informal advisers, and users spoken to said that their main approach to finding advice information on the internet was to use Google.com.

⁸ But note that high quality colour printed copies were provided to the partners in the pilots.

This fits with wider statistics about Google's market dominance in the search engine business.

3.5.3 Structured access to young people

Respondents discussed the possibilities for ensuring that guides were available to young people, and one place that was highlighted was schools.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions in this section are linked to each of the recommendations. Recommendations are of four kinds, and follow the process of developing and producing guides, through how they are used, and finally on to how they can be better evaluated.

4.1 Quality standards

Recommendation a) Effective high quality guides require the creative application of the quality standards outlined below.

Recommendation b) These editorial standards should be applied fully from the start of the process of deciding what guides are to be produced.

To be most effective, guides need to be produced following a framework composed of these clusters of elements, (in no particular order):

- Techniques that are attention-grabbing – language, design, presentation of information
- ‘Active’ presentation techniques that require the user to respond/choose/decide what is relevant for them
- Formats, language and illustrations self-evidently relevant to the culture of the user

- An introduction and an overview of the whole of a particular problem or particular situation
- The basic legal points about that problem or situation
- All of the identified key issues and situations for the target group(s) of users
- Provide information on ‘soft’ aspects – feelings, degrees of difficulty, the scenarios a user will encounter

- The sorts of people and agencies the user may have to deal with and why
- The differences between different advisers/professionals, and the transitions between them, to avoid the user’s getting lost in the spaces between professionals

- Information that follows the processes or procedures users are facing in a way that is as intuitively sensible for the user as possible
- The decisions the user will need to make and what they will need to do
- Information on how to do things
- Information on next practical steps for users

4.2 Modelling user contexts

Recommendation a) Standards need to be combined with working models of the variety of potential contexts that users experience problems in.

Recommendation b) Both the editorial standards and the models of user contexts will need to be revised and improved as they progress - modified by

the feedback received when drafting and evaluating the guides, within the partnerships that have developed.

The focus or conceptualisation of the user situation should shape the whole guide. To work best, guides need a clear focus that is led by a very well-specified user situation capable of providing the structure of the guide, and also dictating the content. There were shortcomings of focus to some extent in all of the guides.

A well-specified user 'situation' will be made up of several key elements:

- a clearly identified user
- a well specified context such as unemployment, leaving care, and so on
- the legal rights that arise
- a profile of the user that addresses skills, expectations and culture
- a specification of the different actions and interactions that will cross the user's path in dealing with the context

Detailed consideration of potential contexts for uses of guides is essential if the guides are to be of value for dealing with the problem addressed. Such consideration may also reveal unexpected potential uses of guides.

Recommendation c) Involving informal advisers and users more fully in the drafting of guides will improve the detailed understanding and specifying of user contexts.

Advicenow has had some success in involving advisers and informal advisers in the development of its downloadable guides, and it would improve the value of guides if users were similarly involved. Involvement in drafting would also help to build relationships that would offer more certain vehicles for guide evaluation in the future.

Recommendation d) Examining in detail the advice-giving and informal adviser interactions that users find themselves in will strengthen the models for client contexts which should lead production of the guides.

Who users will need to seek help from, why, and in what circumstances, has been a growing feature of Advicenow guides, and Advicenow should continue with these models for its guides. To date one Advicenow guide has been produced in separate editions for informal advisers, and more of these are likely to be a fruitful direction for development.

Users often experience particular difficulties when they need to get help from more than one professional, and the differences and 'gaps' between what different professional offer can of itself be a difficulty. Advicenow should ensure that these differences are allowed for in the content and structure of the guides.

Recommendation e) Involvement of a broader range of informal advisers would potentially allow a wider range of aspects of users' contexts to be reviewed in developing guides.

Advicenow's efforts to engage with informal advisers have so far been limited to agencies whose role is fairly similar to that of the advice agency. It is possible to map out a wider range of the informal advisers that users are most likely to encounter in the context of the problem addressed by the guide.

This point supports the idea that active formats should be further explored, as well as that the guides should be aimed at supporting and extending existing relations, where basic skills relevant to problem solving might be taught. This suggests that working with informal advisers within education might be a useful way forward.

The sorts of informal advisers most relevant to each problem will vary, though it is possible to suggest some that may be more likely to be encountered than others. Examples might include medical and nursing professionals, or educators of many kinds. Educators are a group very likely to have a grasp of issues like 'life skills' and ways of learning that in themselves already touch on issues of public legal education. As a result, the development and use of guides in partnerships that include educators might be relatively easy to negotiate implement in pilots.

Recommendation f) Models of contexts should include all interactions.

Most problems will require users to interact with a range of professionals and agencies, especially in dealing with more complex problems. As well as their advisers and supporters, these professionals may include agencies that they are potentially in conflict with. In developing the structure and content of its guides, Advicenow should ensure that these other interactions are allowed for and included.

4.3 The need to link presentation modes

Recommendation a) Information that supports the work of informal advisers and advice workers will be most effective if it can be used for or linked in to other media and modes of explanation.

Recommendation b) Paper and internet guides both have a role to play, but the different roles of each in relation to the adviser, informal adviser and user need to be planned and specified as part of their development.

The value of virtual guides compared with guides available only in paper form are numerous, but should be assessed carefully when shaping Advicenow's information strategy. The advantages include being easily able to search for specific guides on the site, their potential integration with other supporting materials on the site, their portability, in that they can be emailed to others, and their potential multiple uses, since they are available in a number of formats, and can be cut and pasted into other documents such as training materials. These possibilities also need to be communicated to advice workers and informal advisers.

Recommendation c) Advicenow should explore multiple uses of the guides, and the multiple formats that this may involve.

In terms of the provision of guides, and advice in general, it is the various ways of searching Advicenow that represents a major advantage over other text-based advice sources, such as paper guides. In producing paper copies of guides for evaluation, Advicenow has extended the range of possible issues and contexts for their guides. This also implies developing internet searches for specific types of materials such as guides / web pages / letters / training materials.

4.4 Continue to develop presentation techniques

Recommendation a) An appeal to a variety of senses, either through images or content, would be a useful addition to the presentation techniques used.

Case studies in the first person voice position the reader as a 'listener' - evoking the user's sense of hearing. Organising information around 'road maps' evokes the visual. Discussing emotions brings out another mode of 'understanding' information.

Consultation on, and experiment with a range of techniques will assist Advicenow in ensuring that techniques promote accessibility for the target users.

4.5 Supporting the writers and the users of the guides

Recommendation a) Advicenow should institute an induction process for guide writers.

Guide writers need to be kept up-to-date with the lessons that Advicenow has learnt in guide production.

Recommendation b) Advicenow should provide guidance for advisers and informal advisers on how to use the information, both with users and potentially in other contexts.

Since the format of virtual guides is relatively new, and since there are multiple possible modes of usage, it is worth producing guidance on these modes of usage to support informal advisers. This might also include notes on using the guides as a part of training for users, particularly if educators are being considered as informal advisers.

4.6 Production values and accessibility

Recommendation a) Advicenow should re-examine its procedures for assuring the downloadability and print qualities of its guides and modify the style and size of guides as needed.

Advicenow has made consistent efforts to ensure that its internet guides can be downloaded over slow internet connections, and that printed copies will come out well from most types of printer, including in black and white or greyscale. However, there is some evidence that both downloading over a dial-up connection and the quality of b&w prints are less than optimal.

Recommendation b) Persist with attempts to get funding for quality colour printing in volume.

Although it is extending Advicenow's remit to start printing its guides up, there are many good reasons for them to do so. Not all users will access the internet. Many will not read even if they do. Many issues require support from an informal adviser, and printed versions are useful for supporting these kinds of interactions. This is especially true considering the limited printing facilities and time many informal advisers will have. Last but not least, the high editorial standards, and the sophisticated drafting and evaluation process that Advicenow is developing, give it a strong rationale for becoming a central distribution point for public legal information.

4.7 Market the Advicenow website

Recommendation a) Advicenow needs to continue developing its marketing.

General awareness of Advicenow was low amongst all of those interviewed, in both evaluations, amongst the majority who had not previously worked with the site. Having content that is produced and evaluated in relation to, and thus is supportive of, various contexts and types of interaction is not enough. You also need to get people to pick the information up, run with it and then recommend it to others.

This implies promoting the site and the guide directly to informal advisers and advice workers, as well as providing materials to help them in using the guides. This could act as a compliment to marketing aimed at users. Careful integration of the guides with the site would increase the chances that promoting the guides to informal advisers and advice workers will lead to more referrals of users to the main site.

Recommendation b) An approach to Google is feasible.

Advicenow needs to pay attention to the ways in which people already tend to search for information, Google being a prime example of this.

It is possible that Advicenow might be able to work with Google UK in providing a new Google service, akin to Google Images or Google Maps, perhaps called something like Google Rights. This might be an alternative to focussing exclusively on search engine ratings.

This type of approach to Google would need to maximise the publicity factor of such a move. This is not impossible, since it would also be good political publicity: A nice example of a kind of public-private partnership in legal information provision. The prospect of a photo opportunity shared by a Google UK executive and a politician might perhaps provide the catalyst for such a deal.

4.8 Earlier evaluation

Recommendation a) Evaluation needs to be built in at the start of the process of developing guides.

Ensuring evaluation is built in avoids the sorts of problems experienced in this evaluation. It would ensure that there are procedures in place to make data gathering possible from the start.

Recommendation b) Involvements of different target users and professionals from the start will help to build evaluative relationships into the process of guide production.

Users and informal advisers are essential for the evaluation of the guides, and evaluative relationships with users and informal advisers need to be established at the start of the process. This would also address the difficulties faced in getting responses to the quantitative inquiries.

4.9 Active evaluation methods

Recommendation a) Use qualitative evaluation methods to promote involvement.

Many of the advice workers and informal advisers involved in this evaluation found the evaluation process interesting. The process of using the guides and then of discussing them in depth with an evaluator, as well as sometimes with users and other professionals, helped them to better understand their own practice. This positive response was in contrast to their dismay at the thought of 'yet another form', which Advicenow's quantitative data feedback sheets and questionnaires approaches evoked - especially amongst informal advisers.

This motivational aspect is likely to be crucial in any ongoing evaluation effort, and so is something that Advicenow should be sensitive to in its evaluation model.

Recommendation b) Use these active evaluation methods in the development of a 'model' for evaluation that can be used by advice agencies.

One of the aims of this evaluation, as with the preceding 'How to' evaluation, has been to contribute to a 'model' for information evaluation useable by advice agencies who want to produce their own support guides. The evaluation used discussions about the guides as its main research method, and both advisers and informal advisers were impressed by its ease of use and its effectiveness as method for collecting useful feedback. As a technique, discussion also permitted information to be gathered without placing service users in the awkward position of commenting directly on the help they had received from their adviser.

Appendix 1: Partners to the Evaluation

For Bailiffs and debt

Blackfriars Advice Centre (BAC)

BAC offers a range of generalist advice plus special sessions for members of the Irish and Bangladeshi communities and people with mental health problems. Areas of advice: Education, employment, immigration, debt, housing, utilities, taxation, welfare rights/benefits. Reception service offers help with form-filling, letter writing and job applications. Members of the Money Advice Team helped with an interview on the guide about "Debt & Bailiffs."

Contact Details:

199 Walworth Road
London
SE17 1RL

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:

Kathy Walde, Money Advice Team Leader
Phone 020 7701 3999

For Divorce – a survival toolkit

Cleveland Family Mediation Service (CFMS)

CFMS is also part of National Family Mediation (NFM). CFMS is committed to providing mediation to everyone who needs it in all communities. NFM mediators help end users to reach joint decisions about the issues associated with their separation - children, finance and property. CFMS employs professionally trained workers covering mediation, children's counselling and support for couples and parents at any stage of separation or divorce. They helped us by providing an interview with one of their mediators about the Divorce guide

Contact Details:

St. Mary's Centre
82-90 Corporation Road
Middlesbrough TS1 2RW

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:

Dorothy Poole, Mediator
Telephone: 01642 222967

NCH Family Mediation

NCH Family Mediation is a part of NCH, one of the UK's leading children's charities, helping children achieve their full potential. Through its services NCH supports some of the UK's most vulnerable and excluded children and young people. Formerly known as The National Children's Home, today they are simply called NCH. Their Family Mediation service offers practical information for children, young people and parents going through a family break-up. The mediators are professionally trained to help parents going through separation and divorce come to realistic agreements.

This includes the finances and property as well as consultation with the children. Two of their centres helped us by providing telephone interviews with their mediators about the divorce guide.

NCH Cumbria Family Mediation and Children's Support Service

Meadow Bank
Shap Road
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 6NY

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:
Jackie Hayton, Project manager
Jackie.Hayton@nch.org.uk
Tel: 01539 733705

NCH Eye to Eye Mediation and Child's Eye Children's Support Service

231 Camberwell New Road
Camberwell
London
SE5 0TH

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:
Deborah Shead, Project Manager
Deborah.Shead@nch.org.uk
Tel: 020 7701 1114

South Essex Family Mediation

South Essex Family Mediation(SEFM) is a part of National Family Mediation (NFM) a network of over 60 local not-for-profit Family Mediation Services in England and Wales offering help to couples, married or unmarried who are in the process of separation and divorce. SEFM is committed to providing mediation to everyone who needs it in all communities. NFM mediators help end users to reach joint decisions about the issues associated with their separation - children, finance and property. South Essex Family Mediation helped us by providing an interview with their mediators about the Divorce guide.

Contact Details:

7 Fauners
Kingswood
Basildon
Essex
SS16 5AP

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:
Martin Dodd, Project Manager
Tel: 01268 285111
Email: mediation.southessexrelate@virgin.net

For Homeless – get your foot in the door!

Christian Action Housing

Christian Action's Deborah Tempest House is an innovative response to the need to provide short term accommodation for single homeless people in North London. CA's team of support workers provides much more than just a housing management service, with training, life skills and welfare advice. Residents usually join the project for 12 - 18 months. Thereafter the association seeks through its own housing and by working in partnership with the Local Authority to provide suitable move on provision. They helped us by allowing us to hold a group interview at one of their sheltered housing schemes, with a group of young people and support workers present.

Contact Details:

Christian Action (Enfield) Housing Association Ltd.
61 Island Centre Way
Enfield
EN3 6GS

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:

Team Leader: Vernon Loo
Tel: 020 8370 4923

Enfield Law Centre Streetlegal Project

The Streetlegal project specialises in giving legal advice to children and young people. It can offer help and assistance in housing & homelessness matters, welfare benefit appeals, school exclusions (where there is no parental support), child abuse and employment rights. They helped us during this evaluation by setting up a group interview with themselves and local Connexions Advisors, as well as by setting up an additional group interview in a sheltered housing scheme that they were working with.

Contact Details:

38 Market Square
Edmonton Green
London
N9 0TZ

Contact people for information regarding the evaluation:

Project Manager: Emma Day
Senior Legal Caseworker: Penny Gentles-Choudhury

Telephone: 020 8807 8888

Fax: 020 8807 8844

Email: emma@enfieldlawcentre.org.uk / penny@enfieldlawcentre.org.uk

Streetwise Law Centre

Operated by Youth Action UK the Streetwise Law Centre in the London Borough of Bromley is the only law centre in England dedicated to giving free advice and advocacy to 13-25 year olds. Staffed by Solicitors, Youth Workers and Connexions South London Personal Advisers, the Law Centre is based in a youth project, it has

taken on 123 legal cases and given advice to over 350 young people in the last two years.

Contact Details:

1-3 Anerley Station Road
Anerley
London
SE20 8PY

Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:
Young Person's Lawyer: Roselle Potts
Tel. 02087684461

For Young Workers

Centre for Filipinos

The Centre for Filipinos (CF), formerly known as the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW), is a registered charity and established as a company limited by guarantee. CF is currently operating two centres based in the London boroughs of Camden and Hammersmith & Fulham in the UK. It was established in 1979 in order to address the growing needs of the Filipino community in the United Kingdom and Ireland now numbering as estimated 120,000.

It now provides advice on working rights and visa applications, as well as training in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and legal advice from a visiting solicitor, alongside cultural awareness programmes for Filipinos and the wider community. In addition to celebrating and promoting Filipino culture, CF works closely with other Filipino organisations and ethnic community groups to build on the strengths and entrepreneurship of the community. They helped us in both this evaluation, as well as the previous 'How to' evaluation by allowing us to set up group interviews containing a mixture of their staff and end users.

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2 Margravine Road
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Contact person for information regarding the evaluation:
Linda Bondock, Women's Support worker.

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Appendix 2: Respondents and Interview Contexts

Interview 1

| Participant | Identity | Occupation | Gender | Age (years) | Participant Type |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1A & 5H | White English Agnostic | Project Manager, Law Centre | Female | 26-30 | Legal Advice Provider |
| 1B & 5I | White | Lawyer | Female | 31-35 | Legal Advice Provider |
| 1C | White British | Youth Worker | Female | 26-30 | Informal adviser |
| 1D | British Asian | Youth Worker | Female | 26-30 | Informal adviser |

Interview 1 was carried out in a Connexions office, with two workers from the local Law Centre present, as well as two youth workers. The interview was set up by one of the Law Centre Solicitors especially to discuss the guide. We discussed the guide, as well as negotiating how to evaluate it further.

Interview 2

| | | | | | |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|
| 2A | White Agnostic | Project Manager, Law Centre | Female | 31-35 | Legal Advice Provider |
| 2B | White British | Youth Worker | Female | 26-30 | Informal adviser |
| 2C & 4A | Black Caribbean | Youth Worker | Male | 26-30 | Informal adviser |
| 2D | Black British | Youth Worker | Female | 36-40 | Informal adviser |
| 2E | Black British | Youth Worker | Female | 21-25 | Informal adviser |

Interview 2 was carried out in a Youth drop-in centre, as a part of a regular capacity building meeting. The Law Centre solicitor arranged for me to approach a group of Youth Workers whom she met with regularly. We discussed the guide, as well as negotiating how to evaluate it further.

Interview 3

| | | | | | |
|----|---------------|----------|--------|-------|------------------|
| 3A | White British | Mediator | Female | 46-50 | Informal adviser |
|----|---------------|----------|--------|-------|------------------|

Interview 3 was a one-to-one carried out over the phone with a mediator. We discussed the guide in relation to the context of her mediation work. She did not have specific end user examples to discuss, but gave a fairly detailed evaluation of the guide in relation to her general experience of working with end users.

Interview 4

| | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|---------|--------|-------|----------|
| 4B | Black British Christian | Student | Female | 15-20 | End user |
|----|----------------------------|---------|--------|-------|----------|

Interview 4 was carried out with 2C present also. During interview 2 he committed to calling me if an end user, with whom it would be suitable to use the guide, came up. I met with him and his end user 4B, in the Connexions office, to which he is attached as a part of the local youth service. We did a before and after session, with him briefing her to visit the HPU, and using the guide as part of that briefing, and with her giving feedback on her visit to the HPU, and the way the guide fitted into that afterwards.

Interview 5

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------------|
| 5A | Turkish | Unemployed | Male | 21-25 | End user |
| 5B | British Ghanaian | Didn't Answer | Male | 15-20 | End user |
| 5C | British | Unemployed | Female | 15-20 | End user |
| 5D & 7A | Christian | Student | Female | 15-20 | End user |
| 5E | British | Unemployed | Male | 15-20 | End user |
| 5F | British Black Caribbean | Sales Assistant / Student | Female | 15-20 | End user |
| 5G | British | Team Leader | Male | 31-35 | Informal adviser |

Interview 5 was carried out in a voluntary sector sheltered housing scheme. The interview was arranged by the Law Centre Solicitors from Interview 1, 1A & 1B, who were also present during the interview. The young people were interviewed with their support worker present. Most of them had experienced homelessness of one sort or another, and a few of them had been in care. We discussed the guide in relation to

their experiences, as well as exploring their interaction with the law in relation to both the support worker and the Law Centre Solicitors.

Interview 6

| | | | | | |
|----|---------|-----------------|------|-------|------------------|
| 6A | British | Project Manager | Male | 41-45 | Informal adviser |
|----|---------|-----------------|------|-------|------------------|

Interview 6 was carried out over the telephone with a Mediator. He was the manager of a mediation centre, as well as the only male mediator interviewed. We discussed the guide in relation to his general experience, as well as the case of a specific end user. However, he had not received direct end user feedback about the guide, but gave me his sense of how the end user responded to it.

Interview 7

| | | | | | |
|----|---------------|---------|--------|-------|----------|
| 7B | White British | Student | Female | 15-20 | End user |
|----|---------------|---------|--------|-------|----------|

Interview 7 was carried out as a conference call as a follow up to interview 5. One of the participants from interview 5 also participated (5D.) I arranged this interview with the support worker at the centre (5G) because I felt that the 16-17 year olds present at interview 5 had not had sufficient opportunity to speak out in the larger group.

Interview 8

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|
| 8A | White Other | Project Manager / Mediator | Female | 36-40 | Informal adviser |
|----|-------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|

Interview 8 was carried out as a telephone interview with a mediator and project manager. She did not discuss the guide in relation to particular end user cases, but had discussed it in her team meeting with her mediators, and so forwarded the consensus from that meeting to me. We also discussed the context of her work in terms of the legal requirements for Solicitors with regards legal aid and family mediation, and how the guide might fit into that.

Interview 9

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|
| 9A | White British Agnostic | Project Manager / Mediator | Female | 36-40 | Informal adviser |
| 9B | White British Christian | Mediator / Relationship Counsellor | Female | 46-50 | Informal adviser |
| 9C | White British Agnostic | Family Mediator | Female | 56-60 | Informal adviser |

Interview 9 was carried out as a telephone conference with 3 family mediators. It was set up through liaison with the project manager (9A.) We discussed the guide in relation to their work, and also in the context of their need to co-operate with solicitors.

Interview 10

| | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|
| 10A | White British | Money Advice | Female | 36-40 | Legal Advice Provider |
|-----|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|

Interview 10 was carried out as a telephone interview with a Money Advisor of a Citizen's Advice Bureau. It was arranged through her manager. We discussed the Debt & Bailiffs guide, which she had been involved in drafting.

Interview 11

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|
| 11A | Southeast Asian Filipino | Teacher | Female | 31-35 | Informal adviser |
| 11B | Filipino Catholic | Arts Consultant / Heritage Worker | Female | 46-50 | Informal adviser |
| 11C | Filipino Catholic | Domestic | Female | 26-30 | End user |
| 11D | Filipino | Housekeeper / Nanny | Female | 31-35 | End user |
| 11E | White - Non Religious | Support Worker | Female | 46-50 | Legal Advice Provider |

Interview 11 was carried out in a migrant workers community centre. It was arranged with the support worker (11E) who had also participated in the 'How to' evaluation. I approached them with the young workers guide, because the issues around employment it raised seemed relevant to them, from what I had heard of their context from the 'How to' evaluation.

Appendix 3: Research instruments

Topic Guide for the Homeless Guides

Discussion guides for the Young Workers and Bailiffs and debt guides were tailored editions of this guide.

“I am an independent researcher, working with “Advicenow” to try and evaluate how helpful their website is to the public. Me being independent means that you can say what you really feel about the site, and all your comments will be kept confidential.

Advicenow are a search engine and portal for free legal advice available on the internet.

If you don't mind, I'd like to record your comments, on tape. Again, I will keep the comments confidential –nothing will be linked to your name.

Firstly I'd like to find out the sorts of problems that you might have, and how you would get help dealing with those problems.”

1. Background/context – problems experienced

- Types of problems
- Are these linked with any other problems?

*Prompt to discuss how they try and solve these problems
If it is difficult to do so, why*

2. Background/context - getting help

- What help have you sought, if any?
- How and where from?
- Barriers to finding help?

3. The Advicenow guides

Read the following statement out. Clarify if need be

“Advicenow have put together guides giving advice about homelessness. I wonder if you have had a chance to look at them. It is really useful if you can tell us what you think, if the information is relevant to the types of problems you have, which types of problems it doesn't help you with and how you would see yourself using this kind of information.”

- Discuss initial impressions
- Discuss how it was or could be useful to them

- Explore if anything is missing
- Explore what things it doesn't help them with
- Explore how they have used or might use this kind of information
- Explore other kinds of information they would like, if any

Read the following statement out. Clarify "format" if need be

"Advicenow is also very concerned about the format, the presentation of the guide.

- Explore layout, sequence, images etc
- Explore value of having the two editions
- Explore suggestions for other ways of presenting, other techniques

Discuss specifics - get them to point at the page. Focus on details

The questionnaires for "Divorce - a Survival Toolkit"

This questionnaire is on the Advicenow website Divorce - a survival toolkit page. Very few responses had been received as of April 2006. The paper questionnaire posted to mediators was an edition of this internet version.

As part of our continuing efforts to improve our internet information, Advicenow wants to find out from you what you think of the Divorce toolkit. Would you mind spending a few minutes filling in this short questionnaire and emailing it back to us at: evaluation@advicenow.org.uk.

Rest assured that your reply will be completely anonymous. We will separate your reply from your email and your email will be deleted from our account once this is done.

This questionnaire can be filled in very quickly, but if you would also like to spend a little time letting us know what you think in more detail, this would be very useful for us.

Questions 1 & 2.

Could you give us a bit of background information, by typing your answers after Q1 and Q2?

Q1. Why did you want to read the guide? *Answer:*

Q2. How did you hear about the guide? *Answer:*

Questions 3 to 8.

Each of these is in two parts. Each makes a statement about the guide, and we want you to pick your level of agreement/disagreement with each statement, by typing one of the letters A to E after each one:

- A Totally agree
- B Partly agree
- C Not sure
- D Partly disagree
- E Totally disagree

The second part of each question - *in italics* - asks you to tell us why you have 'scored' A,B,C,D, or E. If you want to say things about different parts of the guide - for example you may find some parts more useful than others – then this is where we would like you to do it. Please type any comments that you have after the question.

Q3. “The guide was well designed.” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

Q4. “The information in the guide was useful for me.” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

Q5. “The information in the guide related very closely to the issues I am dealing with” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

Q6. “It was easy to find my way to the most useful information in the guide.” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

Q7. “There was enough information in the guide” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

Q8. “The guide helped me to decide what to do next.” ABCD or E?:

Reasons or other explanations you would like to add:

That's it! We'd like to thank you again for helping us by filling in the questionnaire. Just to remind you, please email it back to us, as an attachment, at: evaluation@advicenow.org.uk.